

# Southwest Europe swelters as wildfires burn

July 15 2022, by Mathieu Gorse with AFP European bureaus

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Tourists watch dark smoke from the pier in Andernos-les-Bains, France due to a wildfire near La Teste in the southwest of the country.

Southwest Europe was baking under sweltering temperatures on Friday for a fifth day, with the heat sparking devastating wildfires, forcing the evacuations of thousands and ruining holidays.

Armies of firefighters battled blazes in France, Portugal and Spain as Britain, normally much cooler, braced for "extreme heat" in coming days, and even Irish forecasters predicted a taste of blistering Mediterranean-style summer temperatures.

The heatwave engulfing swathes of southwest Europe is the second in weeks, with scientists blaming climate change and predicting more frequent and intense episodes of extreme weather.

In Portugal, five regions in the centre and north were on red heatwave alert on Friday and nearly the entire country remained on wildfire alert as more than 2,000 firefighters tackled four blazes.

As of late Thursday, the fires had killed one person and injured around 60. Nearly 900 people had been evacuated and several dozen homes damaged or destroyed, Portuguese authorities said.

Wildfires have destroyed 30,000 hectares (75,000 acres) of land this year, the largest area since the fires of 2017, in which around 100 people died.

Just over the border in Spain, a fire broke out on Thursday near the Monfrague National Park, a protected area renowned for its wildlife.

Extremadura, where the park is located, has seen thousands of hectares burned this week.

In southwestern France, flames have destroyed some 7,300 hectares since Tuesday and forced the evacuation of 10,000 people—many of them holidaymakers who decided to cut their vacation short rather than remain in makeshift shelters set up by local authorities.

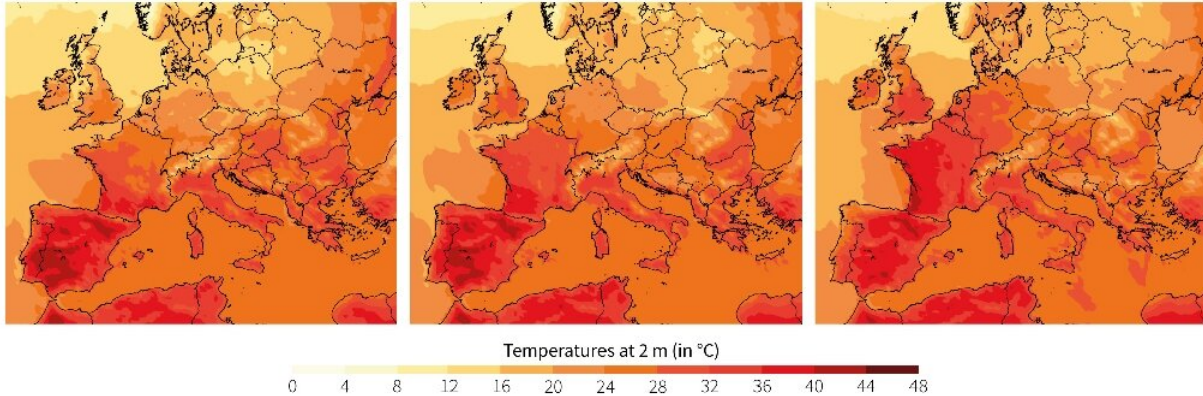
## Heatwave in Europe

Forecast temperatures for Europe

Saturday July 16, 1500 GMT

Sunday July 17, 1500 GMT

Monday July 18, 1500 GMT



Source: European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts, projections as of July 15 at 0900 GMT

AFP

Heatwave in Europe.

### 'Post-apocalyptic'

One fire was raging in pine forests near the Dune du Pilat, Europe's tallest sand dune and a magnet for tourists.

"I've never seen this before and you get the feeling that it's post-apocalyptic really," said resident Karyn on Thursday shortly before the preventative evacuation order of the village of Cazaux near Dune du Pilat.

Nobody has been hurt in the fires which had not been extinguished by Friday.

"The blazes are still not under control, and unfortunately conditions are windy again," firefighter spokesman Matthieu Jomain told AFP.

On Thursday, Portugal recorded its highest ever temperature for July, at 47 degrees Celsius (117 degrees Fahrenheit).

In central Spain, the mercury reached 45.4C on Thursday, just shy of the all-time high of 47.4C registered in August last year.

On Friday, temperatures were forecast to top 41C in parts of Portugal and 44C in parts of Spain on Friday.

Southern France, which hit 38C on Thursday, was expected to reach 40C on Friday and is bracing for more heat early next week.

Britain's meteorological agency on Friday issued its first ever "red" warning for exceptional heat.

The Met Office said there was a 50-percent chance on Monday or Tuesday of temperatures topping 40C for the first time, and an 80-percent chance that the country's previous record of 38.7C set in 2019 will be exceeded.



Wildfires have destroyed 30,000 hectares (75,000 acres) of land in Portugal this year.

### **'Risk to life'**

"Nights are also likely to be exceptionally warm, especially in urban areas," said Met Office chief meteorologist Paul Gundersen.

A red warning is issued when it is "very likely that there will be a risk to life, with substantial disruption to travel, energy supplies and possibly widespread damage to property and infrastructure".

UK hospitals have warned of a surge in heat-related admissions and train operators have told passengers to expect cancellations.

The Irish meteorological issued a nationwide weather warning for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday with "exceptionally warm weather" and daytime temperatures of 25C to 30C expected.

A high of 32C was possible on Monday, Met Eireann said, just short of Ireland's record high 33.3C set in 1887.

Belgian authorities said they, too, expected much higher temperatures next week, with a possible high of 38C in some parts of the country forecast for Tuesday.

Scientists said there was little doubt that heatwaves were caused by global warming and would become regular occurrences.

"Climate change is driving this heatwave, just as it is driving every heatwave now," said Friederike Otto, Senior Lecturer in Climate Science at the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London.

"Greenhouse gas emissions, from burning fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil, are making heatwaves hotter, longer-lasting and more frequent," she said.

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